Farre, Painter to the Cavalry of the Air

Lieut. Henri Farre standing in front of some of his paintings.

French Lieutenant, Official Artist for the French Aviation Corps, Tells of His Work With Fliers

Sketches Aerial Combats While Miles High, as Shells Burst and Death Threatens Every Instant

By DJUNA BARNES.

UP the steps of the French High Commission and into the office of Baron Nuard.

On the walls there are framed notices in French, a map or two, a chart of a trench. In the corner, flanked by letter files and large tomes marked "Personal Bills" sits the pretty secretary.

The Baron is a tall man with heavy rounded shoulders, gray hair rolls away from eyes built plaintively and expressing a vague curiosity, like a middle aged baroness in a Russian novel.

"You wish to see Lieut. Henri Farre," he said, looking at the end of his pencil and moving toward the desk. "He doesn't speak English, you know," he went on, using his own accent as another might use perfume. "I shall have to interpret for you or——" he added, smiling a little, "you might interview me, we Frenchmen are all alike in war time."

I took aonther turn about.

Enter Lieut. Farre.

A long table took up the middle of the room. Seven sharpened yellow pencils marked seven places for note taking, while seven horsehair chairs stood at seven angles around the borders of the room. Suddenly the door opened letting in the persons of Monsieur Frank Crowinshield and Lieut. Farre.

"Bon jour," murmured the Lieutenant, bowing deeply, stretching his straps and wrinkling the long scarlet line that braided his leg.

People had begun to appear about the table, a woman in a melancholy veil with tiny spots, another of medium height who kept folding and unfolding her hands, a heavy jowled gentleman with close set eyes and a boutonniere of little lillies, another talking French to a third, while he pared his nails.

Monsieur the Lieutenant was speaking: "I am very sorry I no speak the English," he was saying, moving his gray beard up and down.

How He Was Appointed.

Here he took his cloak off, laying a large portfolio on the table and a set of prints. He bent his slightly bald head over them, tapping them with his fingers. "Tres joli," he said, picking one up, that of a long faced aviator who might have been a hooded bloodhound. Baron Huard came forward. "The Lieutenant says this picture is a very nice one. He has his own likes and dislikes—even about his art."

"I shall have an exhibition," went on the Lieutenant through the Baron. "I come to teach Americans what war is—a little." He looked away into the dim, cooling green of Gramercy Park, his hands behind him, wrist in palm.

"When the war broke out," he continued, turning back and standing with his legs apart, "I was in Buenos Ayres. I had been painting—a mustache here, an eye there, a mouth. A crowned head, a lady, a gentleman. Then I was interested in technique, interested whether I should draw a button so, paint a rose this way, lay a hand that." He shrugged his shoulders. "One forgets these things, mademoiselle, when mouths are being destroyed, eyes blinded and mustaches themselves like paint-brushes full of blood." He turned, bringing his heels together. "I went to the military authorities. I belonged then to a contingent not as yet called to the colors, and I did not want to remain a mere spectator.

"I was made delegate from the French Army Museum by Gen. Niox, Governor of the Invalides and director of the museum. Since when, mademoiselle, I have been a spectator on the avenue of the stars.

"You see before you a man who in middle life came face to face with the necessity for a change in methods. For five months I tried to reconstruct my vision. Until the war came people had thought little of aerial flight and of aerial existence. The idea of painting in the air, if thought of at all, was only a sensational speculation, something to be done for curiosity; but now that the machine is perfected, now when the aeroplane has come to stay, now when more and more people fly, and the thing begins to be an established commonplace, the artist as well as the layman will have to change.

"Hitherto we have seen things on practically one plane; we are on a level and express in art and literature that sensation produced by being one with the object.

The World Lies Below.

"This is all changed when in flight. The world lies below you, the houses that you have looked up at now you look down upon. The world has become suddenly flat, people are strange motions under hats. Fields of flowers, moving cattle, brooks, trees, all are laid out before you, one with the roots you see only the ends of things, instead of the beginnings. You do not see the roots nor the foundations, you can look up to nothing further saving the limitless blue and to God at such a height one sees only the top of the heart." He laughed, patting the Baron on the arm.

"Monsieur," he said, "what children people are, who have not gone through this battle of the earth."

"What effect will it have on art in general?" he was asked.

"For a time all art will be one of historic observation. In such times as these one cannot indulge in imagination, it is treason toward one's country. Imagination is for times of peace, and historic reproduction for times of war—you see, we owe our country what our eyes see, when that country is in its death pangs. If one sees one's mother dying, one does not imagine how dreadful it is, instead, mademoiselle, one keeps the eyes open, for the thing itself is more imperative than any imagination can be. It is a little more dreadful and a little kindlier than we knew."

"Then you do not think that war cripples art."

Art Crippled by War.

"Oh, yes, war cripples everything, why not art? But out of it, rising from the ashes, art the salamander will appear again, stronger, more hardy, more enduring."

"Will everything be pretty literal for a while?"

"For a while. I will die, my art will die. I would have it so. I not only give my own life willingly to my country, I give also my art's life—can I do more? I know this that I have tried to do, this painting in the air, this gathering of immediate impressions, will not endure, but it is needed, and for France I give my everything."

The Baron broke in. "My dear Lieutenant, that is a very beautiful thing, that which you have just put into words—I know a lot of artists who might give their lives, but certainly not their hope of an artistic immortality."

The Lieutenant waved his hand. "It is nothing exceptional, my friend, we are all doing our little, why not I? I have had my day at painting for myself, now I would paint for others. I come to America as a representative of the French air service, with my painting to arouse—well whatever such pictures should arouse—and if it is not patriotism, then, mademoiselle, I have failed somewhere.

"With my paintings—on exhibition some time in March at the Anderson Galleries—I shall also show bombs and a Gaynemer aeroplane, while some prominent airmen will lecture, and I perhaps also. From these galleries I shall go to others in Boston, Chicago and San Francisco; the proceeds are for the children of the aviators killed in action, and there are too many of them, too many."

"Were you yourself in action, Lieutenant?"

"I never piloted, I was acting only as Observateur-Bombardier au groupe d'Escadrille de bombardment."

"Tell me," I said, "just your method of air painting."

Works While in Flight.

He brought out a chart. A sketch of an air craft, a few dots, a line or two and about thirty numerals.

"Thus," he explained, "do I get the exact color. I have a chart here by which each shade is instantly fixed. For instance, number one is white, number seven is blue, number twenty-eight red and so on. These numbers I mark quickly as I am observing the scene, making just a hasty sketch of the position of trees, houses, clouds and machines. It is of course quite impossible to paint all this in while flying, things move too fast, both on land and in the sky—and I can only make notes, trusting to my sensations to carry them out to the development of the finished painting. Anything else would be only a sort of—well cubism."

"You do not believe in cubism and impressionism?"

He threw up his hands. "Cubism, no, mademoiselle, that is, dishonest child's play—it is certainly nothing for a grown man. Impressionism is different, yes, I can believe in that, providing it is not a cover for ignorance."

"And what do you think of American artists?"

"Very good. Some of them like Sargent, Walter Gay and Cecelia Beaux, they are rational, all bright, gay, quick, not very deep perhaps, but happy. They wear happy, efficient clothes, look intelligent up to a certain point, have a good deal of motion—that is enough."

Some one contradicted him, for the sake of argument.

A Tribute to America.

He answered: "No one is a prophet in his own country. America is of a clearer, brighter fabric, because she has not passed through all the dye baths of Europe. Americans should make good fighters, they have no extraneous barriers to pass through, no ancient culture to hold them back; they are primarily people of action and not of dreams. They have no languors, either of mind or body. American life in itself is a sort of civil war, ending in what is called a successful business man, financier, banker—what you will."

"And what about the books that have been written on the war?"

"Bad," he said, a little color mounting into his forehead. "Bad, bad, bad—nearly all of them. Sensational documents that have nothing whatsoever to do with the heart. False from beginning to

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